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Independent Labour Party
(Great Britain)

All about the I.L.P.

London

[1918?]

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All about the I. L. P.

By

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ALL ABOUT THE I.L.P.

WHY the I.L.P.? We have the Labour Party. Isn't that enough?

Let us face this question frankly.

Building the Labour Party.

That the I.L.P. has a great record of service to Socialism in the past, everyone recognises. It was formed seven years before the Labour Party, at a time when the idea of a workers' party, independent and distinctive in purpose, was as unacceptable to the general Trade Union movement in Britain as it is, for example in America to-day. To its unceasing pioneering propaganda, more than to any other single influence, the decision to establish the Labour Party in 1900 was due.

The I.L.P. was also the largest factor, during the early years of the Labour Party, in making it independent in fact as well as in name. The old Trade Union M.P.s were brought up in the ideas of Liberalism, and for some years they clung to their old associations. The development of the sense of self-confidence and self-reliance in the political Labour movement was the second big contribution of the I.L.P.

The Acceptance of Socialism.

But the I.L.P. did more than help to create the *organisation* of the Labour Party. It sought successfully to give it a new philosophy and policy. It saw that the struggle of the workers must be to supplement political democracy by economic democracy. It aimed at developing Radicalism into Socialism. The general acceptance of Socialism by the Labour movement to-day is largely the work of the I.L.P.

During the Great War.

Another distinctive contribution of the I.L.P. was its stand during the war. When the majority of the Labour movement supported the war, the I.L.P. maintained in belief and action the Internationalism which had always been a part of its faith. The value of that stand is now recognised, even by those who disagreed with us then.

Has the I.L.P. a Future?

All this is accepted. It is agreed that the I.L.P. has had a great past. But has it any special contribution to-day? Has it a future?

It is urged by some that the I.L.P. has accomplished its work. In 1918 the Labour Party included a clause in its constitution which, whilst not using the term "Socialism," defined its object as "the common ownership of the means of production," which must mean Socialism. There is therefore no longer any need, so it is argued, for a special Socialist organisation within the Labour Party.

In the same year the Labour Party opened its membership to individuals, enabling Socialists who are not Trade Unionists to join the Party directly, instead of through the I.L.P. and the other affiliated Socialist societies. This again, it is argued, makes the I.L.P. unnecessary; and, not unnecessary only, but definitely undesirable, because the co-existence of the I.L.P. and the Individual Membership Sections of the Labour Party causes overlapping, confusion, and useless rivalry. Superficially, this case seems strong. But let us consider it more closely.

Organisations Matter Little.

There is nothing sacrosanct about any organisation. The important thing is not the machine, but the things which the machine expresses. If a new machine is created which gives more effective expression to those things, then the old machine should be scrapped. Those of us who have been members of the I.L.P. for a long time have a natural affection for the organisation, but we should be poor Socialists if we placed loyalty to the organisation before loyalty to its cause. We will seek, therefore, to put sentimental attachments aside, and consider the question only from the standpoint of the interests of Socialism.

Pioneer Work Still Necessary.

The I.L.P. was justified in 1893 and 1900 and 1914 because it was a pioneer organisation. It was an advance guard of the Labour movement in urging the formation of an independent workers' party, in seeking to win that party for Socialism, and in maintaining an attitude of Internationalism during the war. The *I.L.P. can only be justified to-day if it is a pioneer organisation*. If it is the same as the Labour Party, the charge of overlapping, confusion and useless rivalry cannot be met. If, on the other hand, it is doing real pioneer work, its continuance is justified. There is always pioneer work to do; there is always the need for pioneers.

The I.L.P. and the Labour Party.

It is possible that under changed circumstances the method of expressing the pioneering mind will assume different forms. For example, if the Labour Party were entirely composed of direct individual members, this function might be fulfilled without a distinct organisation, though even then those who felt and thought together would naturally tend to associate in groups. But at present, despite the individual membership, the Labour Party remains mainly a federal body. Its annual conference is dominated by the Trade Union organisations, and the individual members can only influence the party policy through the representation of the Local Labour Parties, which are again federal bodies. Under such conditions it is obviously desirable that the pioneering function should be fulfilled by a definite organisation, forming part of the wider federation, and able to exert effective pressure within both the local Labour Parties and the national conference for the objects it seeks to achieve.

Is the I.L.P. Equal to It?

If this view is correct, we must proceed to ask whether the I.L.P. is, in fact, still fulfilling the pioneering function. For a time, under the new conditions following 1918, it seemed doubtful if the I.L.P. would adapt itself to the changed circumstances. The new creative ideas in Socialist thought—such, for example, as workers' control—were developed outside its ranks. The new militant spirit, in both the political and industrial sides of the movement, expressed itself most vigorously in other groups. But in the last few years the I.L.P. has recovered the initiative. It has re-discovered its pioneer work and spirit.

Socialists Wanted.

The first work of the I.L.P. remains to convert the workers, and the public generally, to the new attitude of mind which the acceptance of Socialism involves. The constitution of the Labour Party now embodies the letter of Socialism, but no one would say that its mass affiliated membership is yet Socialist in conviction or outlook. Thousands of workers belong to their Trades Unions (and incidentally to the Labour Party) because of custom, or because of immediate advantages in respect to wages and working conditions. Thousands of workers vote for Labour candidates from a sense of grievance against social injustices. This represents a step forward, but Socialism can never grow from a mood of negative discontent. In the long run, the Labour Party and the nation will move towards Socialism only as the workers and the public accept the new outlook and demand its expression.

To secure this, an organisation of active and devoted propagandists is required: men and women who are Socialists first and Socialists last, and who *live* for Socialism. This function the I.L.P. is seeking to fulfil. Its members are first educating themselves—through reading, discussion, study circles, week-end schools, summer schools; and then by means of personal conversation, through the press, by conferences and public meetings, are maintaining a ceaseless work of agitation and education. *Over 600 public meetings are held each week by the I.L.P.* It is the most active political organisation in this country, and probably in the world.

If any man or woman wants to become a *live* worker for Socialism, the I.L.P. should be his (or her) natural outlet. It is an organisation of enthusiasts, constantly equipping themselves more fully for their task, and ceaselessly extending the message to others. It is the great missionary organisation of Socialism.

The Three Philosophies.

But it is not enough to win acceptance of the general principles of Socialism. We have now passed to the practical stage where those principles must be applied. Here we find the second field of activity of the I.L.P.

There are broadly three attitudes of mind among those who are seeking to substitute Socialism for Capitalism. On the one hand there is the group (represented most avowedly in the Communist Party) which believes in the inevitability of violent revolution. On the other hand, there is the section, at present dominating the policy of the Labour Party, which believes in the inevitability of gradualness.

This phrase is open to various interpretations, because any transition which is not catastrophic may be said to be gradual. But it is sufficiently definite to indicate the approach to politics which regards Socialism not as an immediate policy, involving early, fundamental, and comprehensive changes in the social structure, but as an ideal and philosophy by which comparatively small and slowly-developing reforms may be tested, but which, in any real sense, is outside the reach of attainment within this generation.

The I.L.P. View.

The I.L.P. rejects both the inevitability of violent revolution and the inevitability of gradualness. It bases its policy on the belief that the human will, if resolute, and the human mind, if educated, can accomplish vast and beneficial changes within a comparatively short period, and it seeks to create that resolute will and that educated mind. It saw the national life reorganised

from top to bottom within a few years for the purpose of war against Germany. It believes that the national life can be similarly reorganised within a similarly short period for the purpose of war against poverty.

To us the fundamental proposals of Socialism provide an immediate policy, demanding, first, a drastic redistribution of the national income, so that both unmerited destitution and unmerited luxury are abolished, and, second, the transference to the community of the key industries and services, the control of which will determine whether society is dominantly Capitalist or Socialist.

We do not see in the Labour Party's present approach to politics the attitude of mind or the determination of will to regard these big changes as practical politics. That may be due to the absence of such a mind and will within the Labour movement itself; if so, *our task is to create it.*

"Socialism In Our Time."

The I.L.P. policy has been summed up in the phrase "Socialism in our Time."¹ We do not suggest that all the hopes of Socialism can be realised by this generation. We have too big a conception of Socialism for that! But we do believe that, given the necessary will and capacity in the Labour movement, the *foundations of Socialism* can be laid in our time.

The Living Income.

The I.L.P. is seeking to get the Labour movement to accept the socialisation of the national income as an immediate policy. When we speak of the Living Income, we are not thinking of the old Liberal policy of Trades Boards and Welfare Schemes. We are claiming the right of the nation to redistribute the national income and to develop communal services so that undeserved destitution and undeserved luxury may alike be abolished. This could be done in a certain measure by a bold Socialist budget, which would tax large unearned incomes to provide Children's Allowances and extended public services of education, health, housing and pensions. But we recognise that our full aims could not be realised without the more comprehensive Socialist reconstruction we are advocating.

Key Points in the Transition.

Our object in this respect has been to seek out the key sources of power in the Capitalist system and to concentrate upon transferring them to the community. We have found them in the control of banking, foodstuffs and raw materials, power (mining and its by-products, electrical generation, oil production, etc.),

transport and land. Win these for the people by a courageous policy when Labour comes to power, develop our Trade Unions, for the function of sharing administrative control with representatives of the community, and the great essential, irrevocable steps in the transition to Socialism have been taken.

Bold Parliamentary Policy.

We realise, of course, that this means drastic changes in Parliamentary procedure, if the task is to be accomplished without delay, and resolute action to meet the obstruction of the House of Lords, or any reformed Second Chamber. We recognise that all our proposals could not be carried through in one Parliament. But we believe that if Labour proceeded unflinchingly on this course it would so demonstrate its sincerity of purpose, so prove its difference from the old parties, that it would win the confidence and devotion of the people to such a degree that it would be returned to carry on its work with even greater determination.

The Wider Socialism.

The I.L.P. is not merely a political party. Its object is *Socialism*, and it realises that Socialism means the transformation of the whole system of society and must develop along many parallel lines. Equally important with the political advance to Socialism is the advance through the Trade Union and Co-operative movements. Our members seek to serve Socialism through these movements side by side with their political efforts, and policies are being developed to enable our members to act effectively and unitedly towards this end.

"Internationalism In Our Time."

The I.L.P. seeks to express the same challenging and constructive spirit in international affairs. The I.L.P. wants, for example, bolder disarmament policies, bolder policies in dealing with the subject races of the Empire, and organised working-class resistance should war be threatened. It is seeking to create a public opinion which will encourage the next Labour Government to propose *total disarmament* by mutual agreement to the nations of the world. It wants to see the principle of self-determination applied by an invitation to the Indian Parties to prepare their own constitution. It wants a Labour Government which will definitely aim at replacing economic and political imperialism by world economic organisation and Internationalism. It is taking the initiative to secure that the political, industrial, and co-operative Internationals of the working-class shall definitely organise international resistance to war.

International Unity.

The I.L.P. is also doing pioneer work in seeking to bring about a re-union of the International working-class movements. It is urging re-union on the basis of a modification of the obsolete thesis of the Third International, adopted in the revolutionary period of 1919, and a more aggressive policy on the part of the Labour and Socialist International. It is working to bring the newly-arising movements among the coloured workers into contact with the International, so that world unity may be secured.

The Fellowship of Socialism.

These are the policies for which the I.L.P. stands. But Socialism is more than politics. It is an expression of the human mind and spirit. It means a sense of equality with all human beings, it means a will to serve, it means a realisation of all the possibilities of human nature, it means a reaching-out to all the bigger and nobler and more beautiful things of life. Without a sense of fellowship, without a reverence for human personality, Socialism cannot be.

To many of us, the richest thing we have found in the I.L.P. is an earnest of the comradeship to which Socialism calls us. That can only come from a body of men and women inspired by a common ideal and with a common purpose animating their thought and lives. It is as the I.L.P. possesses these that it will live to serve the wider Labour movement.

JOIN THE I.L.P. And Work for Socialism.

If you approve of the objects of the I.L.P. you are invited to join.

Sign this form, then return to local Secretary, or send to the Secretary, I.L.P., 14, Great George Street, Westminster, London, S.W.1.

Please enrol me as a member.

Signed.....

Address.....

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